



Fire Evacuation for those unable to use exit stairs

Seattle Fire Department Fire Prevention Division

The following fire evacuation guidelines are provided for buildings which do not have designated areas of evacuation assistance.

Non-residential

When stairs are required for emergency exit, those persons unable to use stairs need to have a special fire emergency plan. Since it is not safe to use the elevator during a fire, persons unable to use stairs will need to find an **area of refuge** on the floor they are on. Each floor of a building is likely to have multiple places that may serve as an area of refuge during a fire emergency.

An ideal area of refuge would be an enclosed room—near an exit stairwell—that has a door, a window and a telephone. Examples would be an office, a conference room or a classroom located close to an exit stairwell. The door, when closed, provides a barrier to smoke which may be present in the building. The window offers a second route of emergency exit once fire fighters arrive. The telephone provides a backup method of calling for assistance.

In the event that a fire alarm is activated or a fire emergency occurs, those persons unable to use exit stairs should choose an area of refuge on the floor to which to go. They should then wait in the area of refuge for assistance from arriving fire fighters.

It is important that fire department personnel be notified immediately upon their arrival of the location of any known occupants in the building. Fire fighters will then assist in the evacuation of these individuals.

The building's fire emergency plan should describe the procedures to be followed by those people unable to use exit stairs. It should include how to determine an area of refuge, suggest possible areas of refuge within the building, and describe the fire survival rules to be followed. Fire evacuation behaviors should also be practiced during fire drills.

An additional area that may be used for refuge is an enclosed stairwell. This is possible if there is only one individual seeking refuge and if they have two ambulatory assistants to remain with them. Once in the stairwell, with the door securely closed, they should wait for fire department help. Only if conditions deteriorate and become threatening, should the assistants carry the individual down the stairs to a safer area.

Residential

Occupants of residential buildings may use their apartment or living unit as an area of refuge. During a fire emergency, occupants unable to use exit stairs should stay in their unit with the door shut and wait for help from fire department personnel. Residents should also be prepared to follow the advised fire survival rules.

Those residents who choose to stay in their units should be identified to the responding fire company immediately upon their arrival. One way this can be done is by maintaining a roster at the fire alarm panel of residents who plan to stay in their rooms. This roster is then provided to the fire fighters upon their arrival.

Survival Rules

Once you have reached your chosen area of refuge, observe the following survival rules:

- ☒ Keep the door to the room closed. A closed door is a barrier to smoke.
- ☒ Use towels or clothing to block openings around doors or vents where smoke might enter.
- ☒ Place a signal in the window. The signal can be anything that will call attention to your location. For instance, tie the curtains in a knot.
- ☒ If smoke or fire enters your unit, call 9-1-1 to report your location. Stay low to the floor to breathe the best air. Put a wet cloth over your mouth or nose.
- ☒ It is advisable not to open or break windows. Often smoke from the outside of the building can enter through open windows. Breaking windows will put you at great risk to smoke entering from the outside, and will hamper rescue efforts below.

